

## Power distance in Asian Organizational Contexts: A Systematic Literature Review of Concepts, Antecedents, and Moderating Roles

### Jarak Kekuasaan dalam Konteks Organisasi Asia: Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis tentang Konsep, Anteseden, dan Peran Moderasi

**Yodina Rosafil Tuhumena<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [yodina.rosafil@ui.ac.id](mailto:yodina.rosafil@ui.ac.id)

**Arum Etikariena<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [arum.etikariena@ui.ac.id](mailto:arum.etikariena@ui.ac.id)

**Yudhi Iqbal Syarif<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [yudhi.iqbal@ui.ac.id](mailto:yudhi.iqbal@ui.ac.id)

**Syafira Azka Farhani<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [syafira.azka31@ui.ac.id](mailto:syafira.azka31@ui.ac.id)

**Yulianto Hadi Pramono<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [yulianto.hadipramono41@ui.ac.id](mailto:yulianto.hadipramono41@ui.ac.id)

**Shah Husain<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>6</sup>Department of Psychology,  
Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [shah.hussain@ui.ac.id](mailto:shah.hussain@ui.ac.id)

#### Correspondence:

**Yodina Rosafil Tuhumena**

Department of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia  
Email: [yodina.rosafil@ui.ac.id](mailto:yodina.rosafil@ui.ac.id)

#### Abstract

Power distance culture is a prominent organizational culture characteristic in many Asian countries, playing a pivotal role in shaping leadership dynamics, hierarchical relationships, and employee work behavior. This study aims to systematically review empirical findings regarding the impact of power distance within organizational contexts in Asian countries using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Following the PRISMA guidelines, quantitative empirical articles published between 2020 and 2025 were selected. A total of 29 articles from reputable international journals were analyzed to identify patterns of findings, research contexts, and the role of power distance as both an antecedent and a moderator. The review results indicate that power distance predominantly serves as an antecedent associated with negative consequences, such as decreased innovative behavior, voice behavior, and work engagement, alongside increased emotional exhaustion and employee silence. Furthermore, power distance functions as a moderator in the relationship between leadership styles, psychological conditions, and work behavior. The discussion highlights that while power distance generally exerts a negative impact, in specific contexts, this culture can enhance compliance, loyalty, and innovation implementation. This study concludes that power distance is a crucial cultural dimension for understanding organizational dynamics in Asia and emphasizes the necessity for future research that is methodologically diverse, cross-sectoral, and cross-national to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

**Keywords :** Power Distance Culture, Organizational Culture, Leadership, Asian Countries.

#### Abstrak

Budaya power distance merupakan karakteristik budaya organisasi yang menonjol di banyak negara Asia dan berperan penting dalam membentuk dinamika kepemimpinan, hubungan hierarkis, serta perilaku kerja karyawan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau secara sistematis temuan empiris terkait dampak power distance dalam konteks organisasi di negara-negara Asia dengan menggunakan pendekatan *systematic literature review*. Metode yang digunakan mengikuti pedoman PRISMA untuk menyeleksi artikel empiris kuantitatif yang diterbitkan pada periode 2020–2025. Sebanyak 29 artikel dari jurnal bereputasi internasional dianalisis untuk mengidentifikasi pola temuan, konteks penelitian, serta peran power distance sebagai anteseden dan moderator. Hasil tinjauan menunjukkan bahwa power distance lebih sering berperan sebagai anteseden yang berkaitan dengan konsekuensi negatif, seperti menurunnya perilaku inovatif, voice behavior, keterlibatan kerja, meningkatnya kelelahan emosional dan perilaku diam karyawan. Selain itu, power distance juga berfungsi sebagai moderator pada hubungan antara gaya kepemimpinan, kondisi psikologis, dan perilaku kerja. Diskusi hasil menunjukkan bahwa meskipun power distance umumnya berdampak negatif, dalam konteks tertentu budaya ini dapat meningkatkan kepatuhan, loyalitas, dan implementasi inovasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa power distance merupakan dimensi budaya yang krusial dalam memahami dinamika organisasi di Asia dan menekankan pentingnya penelitian masa depan yang lebih beragam secara metodologis, lintas sektor, dan lintas negara untuk meningkatkan generalisasi temuan.

**Kata Kunci :** Budaya Power Distance; Budaya Organisasi, Kepemimpinan, Negara Asia

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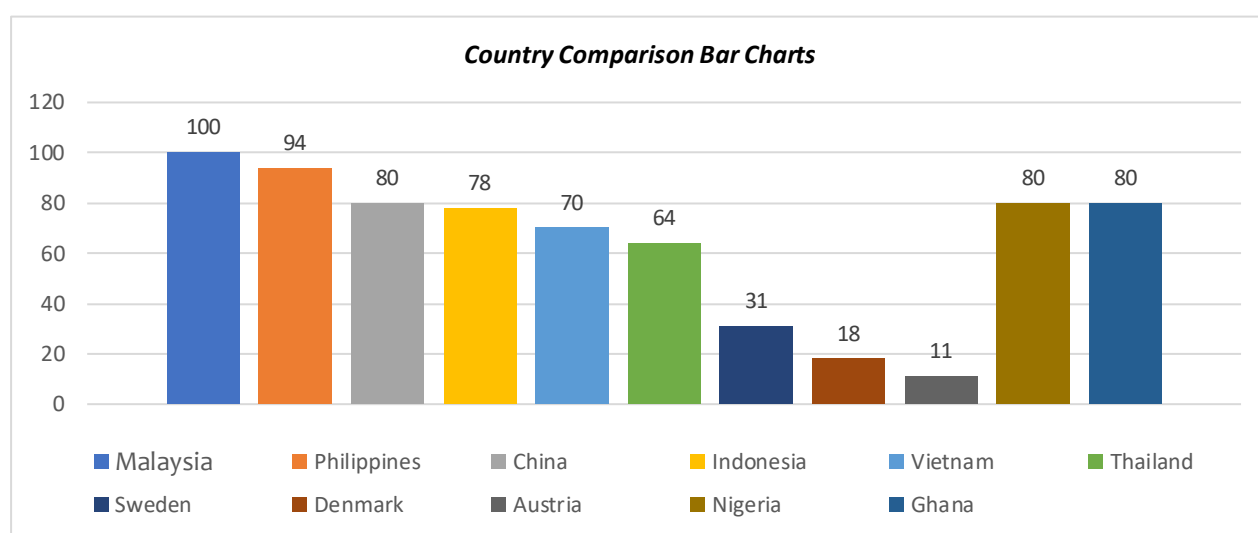


## INTRODUCTIONS

Asia has been recognized as a region with a high power distance index since organizational culture was first assessed by (Hofstede, 1980). Based on this index, several Asian countries fall into the high category; Malaysia scores the highest among all respondent countries, followed by the Philippines, Indonesia, China, and India (Hofstede, 2001). A high power distance index within a country indicates that power inequality is perceived as normal and is accepted by members of organizations (Hofstede, 2001).

In contrast, countries in other regions exhibit different patterns. European nations such as Austria, Denmark, and Sweden have a low power distance index, which aligns with egalitarian principles and participatory power sharing (Hofstede, 2001). In Africa, the power distance

index also tends to be high, as seen in Nigeria and Ghana (Hofstede, 2001). However, the dynamics of social inequality in these countries are influenced by their distinct social structures (Minkov, 2012). These regional differences demonstrate that power distance cultural values in Asia are exceptionally high. This is particularly evident in Malaysia, a constitutional monarchy with a strong bureaucratic structure and labor practices heavily influenced by mandatory authority differentials, making power disparity a standardized pattern within organizations (Yong, 2019; S. Zhang & Shi, 2017). Below is a comparative chart of power distance index values generated from the website <https://geerthofstede.com/country-comparison-bar-charts/>. The researcher inputted the names of the countries to examine and compare their power distance index values, selecting several nations across Asia, Europe, and Africa.



**Figure 1. Comparative Chart of Power Distance Index Values Across Countries**

In a theoretical context, power distance is one of the dimensions explained in organizational culture (Hofstede, 2001), which is defined as the perceived difference (inequality) in the amount of power (influence) possessed by a superior compared to a subordinate. In the early 2000s, researchers began exploring organizational culture at the group and individual levels of analysis, which has been empirically proven to influence work behavior, commitment, and interpersonal relationships (Clugston et al., 2000; Farh et al., 2007). Multilevel research has also demonstrated robust effects across individual, group, and country levels of analysis (B. L. Kirkman et al., 2006).

This study focuses on organizations with hierarchical structures that are heavily influenced by leader interactions, making power distance the most relevant variable compared to other dimensions of organizational culture. This focus is supported by various previous studies indicating that power distance plays a crucial role in leadership dynamics and hierarchical relationships, such as in servant leadership (Jiang & Wei, 2024), self-sacrificial leadership (J. Yang et al., 2021), exploitative leadership (L. F. Zhu et al., 2025), as well as

abusive supervision and leader-member exchange (D. Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, several studies have linked it to inclusive leadership (J. Zhang et al., 2025), transformational leadership (Huynh et al., 2025; Q. Wang et al., 2020), e-leadership, differential leadership and supervisor developmental feedback (H. Zhang et al., 2022), despotic leadership (Mehmood et al., 2024), and morning empowering leadership (Kwan et al., 2025).

Moreover, the urgency of examining power distance specifically during the 2020–2025 period is inseparable from the dynamic pressures exerted by the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace in Asia. The massive implementation of remote working and work-from-home (WFH) arrangements during the pandemic, which continues to this day, has confronted Asian organizations with demands for more participatory and empowering leadership styles (Cremers & Curşeu, 2023) even though Asian organizations have historically operated within strict hierarchical cultures. Conversely, Himawan et al. (2022) demonstrated that the greatest barrier to WFH implementation in Asian countries such as Indonesia, China, India, and Thailand stems precisely

from high power distance, which drives a preference for direct supervision and centralized authority. The gap between these deeply ingrained cultural values and the demands of the new work context makes the 2020–2025 period a critical window for understanding how power distance dynamics operate within organizations in Asian countries.

Consequently, it is essential to conduct a systematic literature review to comprehensively synthesize empirical findings regarding the impact of power distance culture within the Asian organizational context, which is characterized by high levels of hierarchy. This is particularly crucial given that previous SLR studies remain fragmented and have yet to provide an integrated understanding of the patterns of influence and the specific role of power distance.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Overview of the Research Protocol

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) method following the PRISMA guidelines, which refer to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021). The protocol for this systematic review encompasses search, inclusion, and exclusion criteria, as well as the study selection process.

### Literature Search, Selection, Data Extraction, and Synthesis

The selection criteria were established using the PICOS framework for systematic observations (Higgins et al., 2024). The PICOS criteria include: Population (P), consisting of employees across various industrial sectors in Asian countries. Intervention (I) is not applicable to this research design, as the study focuses specifically on power distance. Comparison (C) is also not applicable, as no comparative analysis will be conducted. The primary focus lies on the Outcomes (O), such as statistical results, and the quantitative Study design (S), which includes longitudinal, observational, and cross-sectional studies.

Furthermore, the SLR process in this study follows the framework outlined by Buchanan and Bryman (2009), which consists of the following stages:

- 1) **Stage One: Formulation of Research Questions.**  
Three guiding questions were established: (1) How has power distance culture been conceptualized across Asian industrial sectors (2020–2025)? (2) What is its impact when functioning as an antecedent? and (3) What is its role when operating as a moderator in Asian organizations?
- 2) **Stage Two: Locating and Gathering Articles.**  
A comprehensive literature search was conducted in the Scopus database for peer-reviewed English journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. The search string integrated Boolean operators combining cultural hierarchy terms, industry classifications, and Asian geographic regions: ("power distance" OR "cultural hierarchy" OR "authority distance" OR "power distance culture") AND ("multiple industries" OR "sector industries" OR "various industries") AND ("ASIA" OR "Southeast Asia" OR "East Asia" OR "South Asia" OR "Central Asia" OR "West Asia"). The specific term "culture" was included to exclude non-organizational engineering and electrical disciplines.
- 3) **Stage Three: Selection and Evaluation of Manuscripts.**  
Articles were screened against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). Title, abstract, and subsequent full-text evaluations were performed, with the study selection trajectory systematically documented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.
- 4) **Stage Four: Analysis and Synthesis.**  
Data from eligible studies were extracted into a structured matrix capturing bibliometric details, sectoral contexts, geographic origins, variable roles (antecedents/moderators), and primary empirical findings. Extracted evidence was synthesized using a narrative synthesis approach (Popay et al., 2006).
- 5) **Stage Five: Data Reporting.**  
The synthesized findings were systematically structured and reported, detailing the PRISMA selection flow, descriptive bibliometric distributions (publication trends, journals, sectors, and geographic focus), and theoretical narratives addressing the core research questions.

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

| <b>Criteria</b>    | <b>Inclusion</b>                                                         | <b>Exclusion</b>                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Population         | Workers/employees across various industrial sectors in Asian countries   | Non-workers / non-employees within organizations                                                                                          |
| Main Focus         | Studies examining the influence of power distance culture                | Studies unrelated to power distance culture                                                                                               |
| Design/Methodology | Quantitative designs, cross-sectional, longitudinal studies, experiments | Studies lacking quantitative analysis or statistical measurement; qualitative designs, theoretical papers, editorials, and secondary data |
| Language           | English                                                                  | Non-English and Indonesian                                                                                                                |
| Publication Type   | Peer-reviewed journal articles                                           | Dissertations, conference abstracts, reports, SLRs, meta-analyses, and book reviews                                                       |
| Country            | Asian countries                                                          | Non-Asian countries                                                                                                                       |
| Outcomes           | Statistical measurements (e.g., correlation or regression coefficients)  | Studies without statistical findings                                                                                                      |
| Duration           | Articles published from 2020 to 2025                                     | Articles published prior to 2020                                                                                                          |
| Journal Quality    | Scopus-indexed journals (Q1 & Q2)                                        | Q3 & Q4 journals, Sinta journals                                                                                                          |

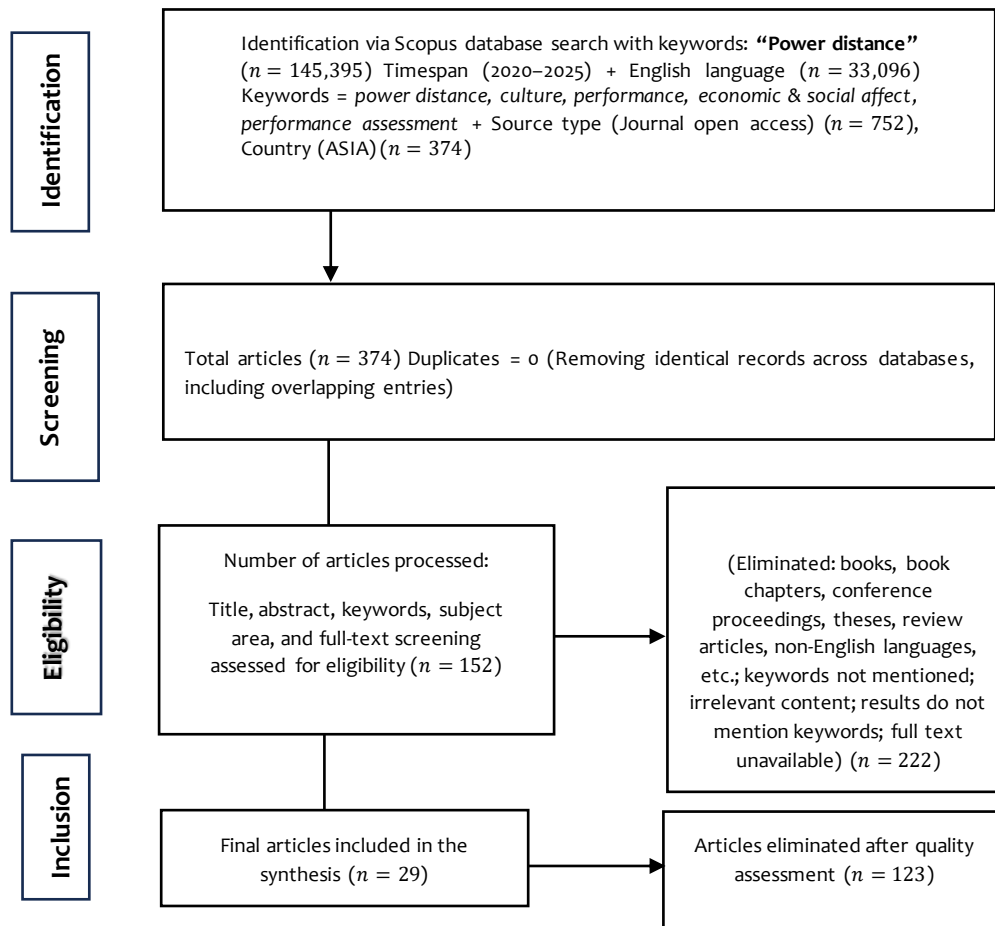


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

## RESEARCH RESULT

This section presents the findings of the systematic analysis conducted to delineate the current state of the literature on power distance. The analysis provides an in-depth examination of the methodologies employed, countries of origin, industrial or organizational sectors investigated, conceptual definitions applied, the structural roles of power distance within the research designs, and its overarching impact across organizations in Asian countries.

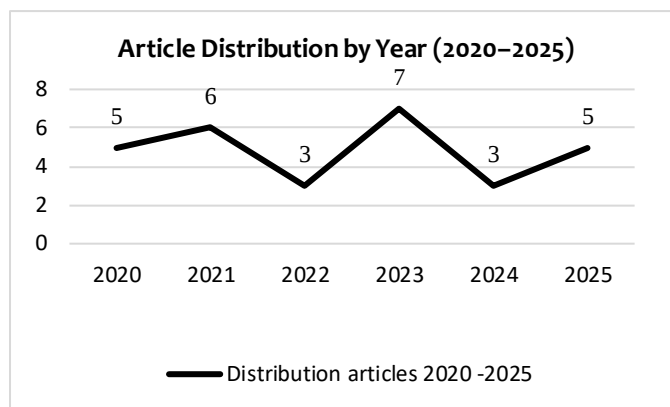
### Article Distribution by Year

Although research on power distance has been extensively conducted since Hofstede’s seminal work in 1983, this study confines its scope to the five-year period from 2020 to 2025. This temporal boundary was established to examine the contemporary impacts of power distance across diverse industries in Asia while ensuring the recency and currency of the synthesized data. In line with Pieper et al. (2014), the relevance of academic literature depreciates substantially over time, exhibiting obsolescence rates of approximately 15% after one year, 25% after two years, and 50% after 5.5 years. Consequently, restricting the review to the preceding five years mitigates the risk of incorporating outdated findings and preserves the analytical quality of the synthesis.

Figure 2 illustrates the research trajectory on power distance over the past five years across the 29 analyzed articles. Publication output peaked notably in 2023. This surge may be attributed to evolving organizational dynamics and the expansion of cross-cultural remote work facilitated by technological advancements, which prompted scholars to investigate how power distance influences modern workplace interactions.

### Most Productive Journal Sources

Table 2 outlines the 18 most productive journals in this domain. *Frontiers in Psychology* yielded the highest volume of publications (n=7), followed by *Sustainability* (n=4), while *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* and *Cogent Business & Management* contributed two articles each. The remaining outlets accounted for one article each. These findings indicate that prominent high-impact journals consistently publish and accord significant scholarly attention to the cultural dynamics of power distance within Asian organizational contexts.



**Figure 3. Distribution of Articles by Year (2020–2025)**

**Table 2. Number of Journals in the Literature**

| <b>Journals in the literature</b>                                      | <b>Frequency</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Frontiers in Psychology (Q1)                                           | 7                |
| Sustainability (Q1)                                                    | 4                |
| Psychology Research and Behavior Management (Q2)                       | 2                |
| Cogent Business & Management (Q2)                                      | 2                |
| Journal of Organizational Behavior (Q1)                                | 1                |
| Journal of Innovation & Knowledge (Q1)                                 | 1                |
| International Journal of Intercultural Relations (Q1)                  | 1                |
| Sage Open (Q1)                                                         | 1                |
| Scientific Reports (Q1)                                                | 1                |
| Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management (Q1)            | 1                |
| Maritime Policy & Management (Q1)                                      | 1                |
| BMC Psychology (Q1)                                                    | 1                |
| Asia Pacific Journal of Management (Q1)                                | 1                |
| International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (Q2) | 1                |
| Organizacija (Q2)                                                      | 1                |
| Problems and Perspectives in Management (Q2)                           | 1                |
| Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (Q2)                  | 1                |
| Behavioral Sciences (Q2)                                               | 1                |

### Industry Sectors and Geographic Distribution of Studies

An analysis of the literature indicates that the majority of studies were conducted across multiple industries within Asian organizations, followed by the healthcare, education, and technology sectors. A key focal area was the examination of multiple large-scale industries combined within single studies, demonstrating that power distance culture remains pervasive and relevant across diverse sectors in Asia. Table 3 presents the contextual classification by industry. Other sectors investigated include hospitality, construction, manufacturing, public service and governmental organizations, among others.

Table 4 outlines the geographical distribution of the reviewed studies, illustrating the countries where power distance research has been conducted. China ranks highest with the largest volume of publications ( $n=22$ ), followed by Vietnam,

Pakistan, Turkey, the UAE, and Indonesia. These findings suggest that power distance dynamics are most frequently examined in Asian nations with high power distance orientations, such as China. Notably, one multi-country study spanned China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and Singapore. This highlights that power distance research over the past five years remains unevenly distributed across Asia, remaining heavily concentrated in China. According to Hofstede (1980), China exhibits a notably high Power Distance Index (PDI) score of 80. Furthermore, China's scholarly dominance is aligned with its overarching research output in recent decades, currently accounting for more than one-third of all papers published in leading scientific journals worldwide (The Macao News, 2025).

**Table 3. Distribution of Power Distance Research by Industry Sector**

| Industry Sector                 | Number of Articles |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Multiple Industries             | 10                 |
| Healthcare                      | 4                  |
| Education                       | 3                  |
| Technology                      | 3                  |
| Public Service and Governmental | 2                  |
| Hospitality                     | 2                  |
| Manufacture                     | 2                  |
| Others                          | 2                  |
| Construction                    | 1                  |

**Table 4. Distribution of Power Distance Research by Asian Country**

| Country of Study                                                                                          | Number of Articles |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| China                                                                                                     | 22                 |
| China & Taiwan                                                                                            | 1                  |
| Vietnam                                                                                                   | 1                  |
| Pakistan                                                                                                  | 1                  |
| Turkey                                                                                                    | 1                  |
| Uni Emirat Arab                                                                                           | 1                  |
| Indonesia                                                                                                 | 1                  |
| China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam. | 1                  |

### Research Methodologies in the Literature

Researchers have employed diverse methodological approaches to investigate power distance. In this review, the focus is directed specifically toward quantitative studies. Across the 29 reviewed articles, various quantitative research designs were identified, including cross-sectional, time-lagged, experimental, and diary study designs, as summarized in Table 5. Quantitative survey methods predominantly relied on online cross-sectional approaches, accounting for 19 of the 29 studies (Chen et al., 2023; D. Wang et al., 2020; L. Zhang et al., 2023). Additionally, longitudinal and comparative frameworks were utilized, comprising three

time-lagged studies and two cross-cultural surveys (Gustiawan et al., 2023; Knoll et al., 2021; Safdar et al., 2021; J. Yang et al., 2021). One study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques (Huynh et al., 2025), while another utilized a daily diary design (B. Yang et al., 2024). Furthermore, several articles incorporated multi-study designs combining distinct methodological approaches, such as pairing cross-sectional with time-lagged designs, time-lagged with multi-source data collection, and experimental designs with survey methods (Jiang & Wei, 2024; Mehmood et al., 2024; J. Zhang et al., 2025).

**Table 5. Breakdown of Power Distance Literature Methodologies**

| Research Design                                 | Number of Articles |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Cross Sectional Survey</i>                   | 19                 |
| <i>Time Lagged Survey</i>                       | 3                  |
| <i>Time Lagged &amp; Multisource</i>            | 1                  |
| <i>Time Lagged &amp; Cross-Sectional Survey</i> | 1                  |
| <i>Experiment &amp; Survey</i>                  | 1                  |
| <i>Experiment</i>                               | 1                  |
| <i>Daily Diary</i>                              | 1                  |
| <i>Cross Cultural</i>                           | 1                  |
| <i>Mixed Method</i>                             | 1                  |

### Conceptual Foundations and Definitions of Power Distance

A synthesis of the literature published between 2020 and 2025 reveals that definitions of power distance consistently draw upon foundational and evolving frameworks established by Hofstede (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001, 2011), Dorfman and Howell (1988), Clugston et al. (2000), Farh et al. (2007), B. Kirkman et al. (2009), Qian and Li (2016),

Koo and Park (2018), Lam and Xu (2019). This indicates that the conceptualization of power distance has undergone continuous theoretical refinement, spanning from its initial formulation by Hofstede in 1980 to more recent perspectives, such as those advanced by Lam and Xu (2019).

**Table 6. Summary of Power Distance Definitions Used in the Reviewed Literature**

| Power Distance Culture Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Scholar(s), Year, and Article Count                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Power distance is another dimension of national culture proposed by Hofstede. According to Hofstede, power distance reflects the extent to which individuals accept power inequality within groups, organizations, or enterprises.<br>Power distance, as conceptualized by Hofstede, reflects the degree to which individuals accept and expect hierarchical inequality.<br>Power distance is defined as the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. | (Hofstede, 1980, 1984, 1991, 2001, 2011); 14 Articles |
| The term “power distance” refers to the individual level of acceptance regarding the unequal distribution of power between leaders and subordinates.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | (Dorfman & Howell, 1988); 2 Articles                  |
| Power distance refers to the extent to which individuals perceive and expect the legitimacy of unequally distributed power within institutions, organizations, and society.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | (Clugston et al., 2000); 5 Articles                   |
| Power distance refers to the degree to which a society accepts the unequal distribution of power within organizations or institutions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | (Farh et al., 2007); 4 Articles                       |
| Power distance refers to the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power within institutions and organizations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | (B. Kirkman et al., 2009); 1 Article                  |
| Power distance is the extent to which less powerful individuals expect and accept that power is distributed unequally within institutions and organizations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | (Qian & Li, 2016); 1 Article                          |
| Power distance describes the degree to which individuals in a society accept and anticipate the unequal distribution of power.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | (Koo & Park, 2018); 1 Article                         |
| Power distance refers to an individual's degree of acceptance of the unequal distribution of power within organizations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | (Lam & Xu, 2019); 1 Article                           |

Based on the conceptual definitions proposed by these scholars, it can be concluded that the foundational construct of power distance originated with Hofstede. Subsequently, numerous researchers have conceptualized and defined power distance culture by building upon and refining Hofstede's seminal framework. Hofstede articulated the construct of power distance across multiple levels of analysis, including the group, organizational, and societal or national levels. The synthesis indicates that Hofstede's conceptualization remains the most predominantly adopted framework across empirical investigations of power distance.

Hofstede posited that power distance is a core dimension of national culture that reflects the extent to which individuals accept power inequality within groups, organizations, or enterprises (Hofstede, 1984). Other scholarly conceptualizations have similarly operationalized power distance as a cultural attribute at both societal and organizational levels (Clugston et al., 2000; Farh et al., 2007). Consequently, across the 29 synthesized articles, power distance has been operationalized at the group, unit, organizational, societal, and national levels. Societal and

national level conceptualizations are primarily employed to compare cross-national differences in values and norms regarding power. In contrast, operationalizations at the work-unit or organizational level focus on the manifestation and structure of power within specific organizational entities, frequently linking it to managerial practices, organizational design, or the overarching power climate.

#### The Impact of Power Distance as an Antecedent and Its Moderating Role Across Asian Industry Sectors

The synthesis reveals that power distance functions prominently as an antecedent in several empirical studies across Asian industry sectors. Overall, findings across these sectors indicate that power distance, when operating as an antecedent, predominantly contributes to negative organizational outcomes. Although a subset of studies reports outcomes that are functionally positive, these often entail dysfunctional underlying mechanisms. This multifaceted pattern demonstrates that adverse consequences remain predominant, as summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Power Distance as an Antecedent

| Impact / Outcome                      | Direction of Effect | Author(s) / Article Source         |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Acquiescent Silent</i>             | Positive            | (Knoll et al., 2021)– Article 1    |
| <i>Prosocial Silent</i>               | Positive            | (Knoll et al., 2021)– Article 1    |
| <i>Opportunistic Silent</i>           | Non-Significant     | (Knoll et al., 2021)– Article 1    |
| <i>Innovative Idea Generation</i>     | Negative            | (Luo et al., 2020)– Article 2      |
| <i>Innovative Idea Implementation</i> | Positive            | (Luo et al., 2020)– Article 2      |
| <i>Voice Behaviour</i>                | Negative            | (X. Zhu et al., 2022)– Article 3   |
| <i>Emotional Exhaustion</i>           | Positive            | (X. Zhu et al., 2022)– Article 3   |
| <i>Social Context</i>                 | Negative            | (W. Zhang et al., 2023)– Article 4 |
| <i>Performance Management Context</i> | Negative            | (W. Zhang et al., 2023)– Article 4 |
| <i>Innovation Performance</i>         | Negative            | (W. Zhang et al., 2023)– Article 4 |
| <i>Task Performance</i>               | Negative            | (Lin & Lu, 2023)– Article 5        |
| <i>Contextual Performance</i>         | Negative            | (Lin & Lu, 2023)– Article 5        |
| <i>Employee Defensive Silence</i>     | Positive            | (Sahin et al., 2021)– Article 6    |
| <i>Employee Constructive Voice</i>    | Non-Significant     | (Sahin et al., 2021)– Article 6    |

Furthermore, recent literature over the past five years demonstrates that power distance frequently functions as a moderator that attenuates relationships between variables. Overall, power distance predominantly weakens positive relationships rather than serving as a buffer

against negative effects, while a subset of the examined relationships yielded statistically non-significant results. A comprehensive summary of the studies investigating these mitigating moderating effects is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Power Distance as an Attenuating Moderator**

| <b>Independent Variable (Predictor)</b>                        | <b>Dependent Variable (Criterion)</b>                                                              | <b>Moderating Effect</b> | <b>Article Source / Reference</b>     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Servant Leadership                                             | ·Autonomy Need Satisfaction<br>·Competence Need Satisfaction<br>·Relatedness Need Satisfaction     | Weakening effect (+)     | (Jiang & Wei, 2024) – Article 7       |
| Safety Objective                                               | ·Proactive Safety Behavior (NS)<br>·Prosocial Safety Behavior (NS)                                 | Weakening effect (+)     | (L. Zhang et al., 2023) – Article 8   |
| Organization and Coordination                                  | ·Proactive Safety Behavior<br>·Prosocial Safety Behavior (NS)                                      | Weakening effect (+)     | (L. Zhang et al., 2023) – Article 8   |
| Safety Supervision                                             | ·Proactive Safety Behavior (NS)<br>·Prosocial Safety Behavior                                      | Weakening effect (+)     | (L. Zhang et al., 2023) – Article 8   |
| Promotion Focus                                                | Psychological Empowerment                                                                          | Weakening effect (+)     | (Chen et al., 2023) – Article 9       |
| Self Sacrificing Leadership                                    | Organizational Identity                                                                            | Weakening effect (+)     | (J. Yang et al., 2021) – Article 10   |
| ·Colleague Participation<br>·Cause Proximity (NS)              | Employee Volunteering                                                                              | Weakening effect (+)     | (Hou et al., 2020) – Article 11       |
| Abusive Supervision                                            | · Job Insecurity<br>· LMX                                                                          | Weakening effect (+)     | (D. Wang et al., 2020) – Article 12   |
| CEO Ethical Leadership                                         | TMT Creativity                                                                                     | Weakening effect (+)     | (J. Zhao et al., 2020) – Article 13   |
| Empowering Leadership Morning                                  | Negative Affect Afternoon                                                                          | Weakening effect (-)     | (Kwan et al., 2025) – Article 14      |
| Social Exchange                                                | Subordinate Taking Charge                                                                          | Weakening effect (+)     | (Q. Wang et al., 2020) – Article 15   |
| Exploitative Leadership                                        | · Employee Anger<br>· CWB                                                                          | Weakening effect (+)     | (L. F. Zhu et al., 2025) – Article 16 |
| Inclusive Leadership                                           | Relational Energy                                                                                  | Weakening effect (+)     | (J. Zhang et al., 2025) – Article 17  |
| Transformational Leadership                                    | · Job Performance(NS)<br>·Work Engagement (NS)<br>·Work Motivation<br>·Organizational Culture (NS) | Weakening effect (+)     | (Huynh et al., 2024) – Article 18     |
| ·Transformational Leadership<br>·Transactional Leadership (NS) | OCBEs                                                                                              | Weakening effect (+)     | (G. Wang et al., 2023) – Article 19   |
| E-Leadership                                                   | ·Psychological Capital<br>·Affective Commitment to leadership                                      | Weakening effect (+)     | (Li & Xiao, 2023) – Article 20        |

| Independent Variable (Predictor)                    | Dependent Variable (Criterion) | Moderating Effect    | Article Source / Reference          |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ·Psychological Empowerment<br>·Subjective Norm (NS) | Attitude Knowledge Sharing     | Weakening effect (+) | (Dong et al., 2022) – Article 21    |
| Despotic Leadership                                 | Psychological Safety           | Weakening effect (-) | (Mehmood et al., 2024) – Article 22 |

Note: + (weakens positive effect), - (weakens negative effect), NS (non-significant)

Conversely, when positioned as a moderator that strengthens the relationships between variables, empirical findings from the past five years across various Asian industrial sectors indicate that power distance more frequently amplifies relationships leading to positive

outcomes. Limited evidence suggests that power distance strengthens dysfunctional relationships; thus, the prevailing pattern of moderation leans predominantly positive. A detailed breakdown of the studies examining this enhancing moderating role is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9. Power Distance as an Enhancing Moderator**

| Independent Variable              | Dependent Variable                                       | Moderating Effect | Article Source / Reference            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Safety Funding Investment         | ·Prosocial Safety Behavior<br>·Proactive Safety Behavior | Strengthens (+)   | (L. Zhang et al., 2023) – Article 23  |
| Prevention Focus                  | Psychological Empowerment                                | Strengthens (-)   | (Chen et al., 2023) – Article 24      |
| Workplace Incivility              | Employee Silence                                         | Strengthens (+)   | (Gustiawan et al., 2023) - Article 25 |
| Motivational CQ                   | Role Clarity                                             | Strengthens (+)   | (Y. Zhang et al., 2021) – Article 26  |
| LMX                               | Employee Innovative Behavior                             | Strengthens (+)   | (Y. Zhao et al., 2025) – Article 27   |
| Impression Management             | OCB                                                      | Strengthens (+)   | (Zandi et al., 2023) – Article 28     |
| Supervisor Developmental Feedback | ·Organizational Loyalty<br>·Supervisory Loyalty          | Strengthens (+)   | (H. Zhang et al., 2022) – Article 29  |

Note: + (strengthens positive effect), - (strengthens negative effect)

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how power distance manifests across various industrial sectors in Asian countries and how its underlying mechanisms influence organizational dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and employee workplace behaviors. Conceptually and theoretically, most reviewed studies rely on the foundational framework established and developed by Hofstede, which emphasizes power disparity within organizational structures. Additionally, several studies draw upon Clugston et al. (2000) to operationalize power distance regarding individual perceptions of hierarchy and authority. Geographically, empirical research on power distance in Asia is predominantly

concentrated in China, reflecting the nation's strong hierarchical cultural framework. China records a Power Distance Index (PDI) score of 80 out of 100, signifying a high acceptance of power inequality (World Population Review, 2025). The synthesized findings indicate that power distance acts as a critical antecedent influencing diverse employee behaviors and performance outcomes. The antecedent role of power distance can be deeply understood through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). In high power distance cultures, employees predominantly define their social identity based on their hierarchical position within the organizational structure. This hierarchy-derived social identity generates normative pressure to conform to

authority and refrain from extra-role behaviors, such as voicing critical opinions or initiating change. Psychologically, this explains why high power distance consistently stifles voice behavior and innovative work behavior (Sahin et al., 2021; W. Zhang et al., 2023). Employees do not merely fear speaking up; rather, they actively internalize the cultural norm that challenging superiors contradicts their defined role within the social system.

This psychological dynamic is further illuminated by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which posits that individuals strive to acquire, protect, and retain their valued resources against workplace stressors. Employees within rigid hierarchical environments face persistent threats to core psychological resources, such as autonomy, psychological safety, and recognition. Continuous efforts to preserve resources amidst hierarchical pressures deplete emotional regulatory capacity, ultimately precipitating emotional exhaustion and employee silence (Gustiawan et al., 2023; B. Yang et al., 2024). Corroborating this perspective, Reformasianto and Faizah (2024) observed that low employee engagement and ineffective communication within Indonesian hierarchical structures represent psychological resource depletion caused by a suppressive work environment rather than mere behavioral reluctance.

Conversely, Luo et al. (2020) revealed that high power distance can paradoxically enhance innovation implementation. Interpreted through COR theory's principle of resource investment where individuals invest current resources to gain new ones cognitive and personal resources in high power distance cultures are no longer expended on negotiating ideas or resisting managerial directives. Consequently, remaining psychological energy is channeled directly and efficiently into executing designated tasks. Employees thus invest their personal resources into implementing innovations to maintain their standing within the hierarchy, sustaining innovative output despite systemic constraints.

Furthermore, the moderating role of power distance can be explained through Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which conceptualizes leader-subordinate relationships as continuous exchanges governed by reciprocity norms. Empirical evidence shows that power distance moderates the positive impact of egalitarian leadership styles; for instance, the positive relationship between servant leadership and basic psychological need satisfaction strengthens under lower levels of power distance (Jiang & Wei, 2024). Similarly, the positive effect of ethical leadership on taking-charge initiative via social exchange is amplified in low power distance environments (Q. Wang et al., 2020). Under low power distance, egalitarian and supportive leadership fosters open, reciprocal exchanges, leading employees to reciprocate with proactive initiative. Conversely, under high power distance, employees internalize an asymmetrical exchange schema where managerial authority demands obedience rather than proactive reciprocation.

In contrast, G. Wang et al. (2023) demonstrated that power distance attenuates leadership effects, particularly

regarding the impact of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behaviors for the environment (OCBEs). However, under transactional leadership, the positive effect on OCBEs persists even in high power distance settings because this style relies on explicit incentive structures and transparent rules. Through the lens of SET, transactional leadership aligns seamlessly with employees' internalized expectations of asymmetrical exchange, indicating that high power distance does not uniformly suppress employee effectiveness when leadership mechanisms match cultural expectations.

Moreover, the strengthening patterns identified by Y. Zhao et al. (2025) and Zandi et al. (2023) align with SET principles. In high power distance cultures, high leader-member exchange (LMX) quality or supervisory developmental feedback is perceived as an exceptionally valuable exchange resource because access to managerial support in steep hierarchies is scarce and privileged. Employees consequently reciprocate with heightened innovative behavior and organizational loyalty. Expanding on this, Safdar et al. (2021) demonstrated that within paternalistic leadership frameworks, leaders provide protection and care while employees reciprocate with loyalty and performance. This paternalistic exchange enhances self-efficacy because employees feel resourced and supported by an authoritative figure. Furthermore, Gustiawan et al. (2023) found that power distance exacerbates the impact of workplace incivility on employee silence. Viewed through SET and COR theories, when subjected to incivility from superiors, employees adopt silence as a rational coping exchange to protect remaining psychological resources and prevent further resource loss.

Overall, this systematic review underscores that power distance is not merely a contextual cultural variable, but an active psychological construct that fundamentally shapes how individuals manage their psychological resources and navigate social exchange relationships within organizations. Viewed through the lenses of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Social Exchange Theory (SET), it becomes evident why high power distance consistently fosters defensive behavioral patterns and conformity: employees do not simply comply with hierarchy but actively engage in psychological dynamics to conserve resources and optimize exchange outcomes within unequal systems. Consequently, this systematic literature review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the multifaceted roles of power distance demonstrating that it operates not only as a moderator that can either strengthen or attenuate various relationships, but also as an antecedent directly influencing employee behavior and performance. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how the cultural value of power distance impacts leadership effectiveness, psychological states, and workplace behaviors.

## Research Limitations

Although this study has strived to conduct a systematic and comprehensive synthesis, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, research on power distance needs to consider other contexts such as organizational size, employee well-being, quality of life, and other organizational cultural factors that enrich knowledge regarding the impact of power distance in Asian countries. Second, current research is still dominated by China, such that generalizability regarding power distance in Asia remains low, and many other Asian countries are not yet evenly represented in power distance research. The third limitation is the heterogeneity in the operationalization of power distance definitions across studies, where some measure it at the individual level, some at the organizational level, and others use country index scores from Hofstede, thereby making direct comparisons of findings difficult and potentially obscuring the conclusions drawn.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the systematic literature review, it can be concluded that power distance exerts a broad and diverse impact on organizational dynamics across various industrial sectors in Asian countries. Power distance is proven to serve as an antecedent that shapes employee work behavior, psychological conditions, and performance, as well as a moderator that can either strengthen or attenuate the relationships among leadership styles, interpersonal relationships, employee behavior, and performance.

In general, cultures with high levels of power distance generate predominantly negative consequences, such as restricting employee voice, creativity, and engagement, and can even psychologically increase emotional exhaustion. However, in certain contexts, power distance can also yield positive consequences that are functional or dysfunctional, such as increased compliance, loyalty, or innovation implementation due to pressure from hierarchical structures. Power distance also plays a role in enhancing employee compliance, loyalty, or innovation implementation due to hierarchical drive. Thus, overall, power distance is a cultural dimension that plays a role in governing leadership effectiveness, organizations, and work behavior.

Based on the findings and limitations that have been identified, several future research directions are worth considering. First, future research needs to explore other contexts or factors, such as psychological mediators that bridge the relationship between power distance and various organizational outputs. Variables such as psychological safety, regulatory focus, psychological capital, and role identity have the potential to explain why and how power distance produces its effects, rather than merely demonstrating that such effects exist. The integration of these psychological mediators will strengthen the theoretical

contribution of the research while providing more actionable practical implications for organizations. Second, future research needs to expand geographical coverage by explicitly targeting Asian countries that have been underrepresented, such as Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines), South Asia (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka), and Central Asia, in order to build a more representative understanding of power distance within a genuinely diverse Asian context. Third, the standardization of power distance measurement in Asian organizational research requires serious attention. Future studies should explicitly distinguish between power distance as a country-level cultural value, organizational climate, and individual perception, as these three levels of analysis entail distinct theoretical and practical implications.

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## ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study is a systematic literature review based entirely on previously published and publicly available academic literature. As it did not involve any direct interaction with human participants, animal subjects, or the collection of private identifiable data, formal ethical approval was not required.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT (TRANSPARENCY OF DATA)

The dataset, search protocols, and synthesized literature supporting the findings of this systematic review are included within the article (and its supplementary material). Further inquiries regarding the raw screening sheets or extracted data matrices can be directed to the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

## DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USAGE

The author(s) confirm that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the conception, data extraction, analysis, or writing of this manuscript.

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